

400th GIANT FOUR-PAGE ISSUE!!



CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, OCT. 22, 1976

NUMBER 400

WAKE OF THE ZOMBIES

4 GREAT SHOWS ON ONE PROGRAM!

FEATURE #1 WITHIN THIS COFFIN LIES A MAN...YET ALIVE!

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S THE PREMATURE BURIAL

Starring **RAY MILLAND** IN COLOR AND PANAVISION

FEATURE #2 SHRIEKING CHILLING TERROR!

BLOOD BATH


Starring **WILLIAM CAMPBELL**

FEATURE #3 EDGAR ALLAN POE'S THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

Vincent PRICE "COLOR"

FEATURE #4 ONLY ONCE IN A LIFETIME CAN YOU STAND THE SHOCK!

BLACK SUNDAY

from AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL PICTURES 

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

THE BIG SCREEN: It hasn't been exactly a comedy renaissance, but during the past few months we've had a goodly supply of them. Well, a supply, anyway. Let's see: *Silent Movie*; *Harry and Walter Go To New York*; *The Big Bus*; *Murder By Death*; *Won Ton Ton*; the Disney confection, *Gus*; couple of sagebrush spoofs like *The Duchess* and the *Dirtwater Fox* and *The Great Scout* and *Cathouse Thursday*. There may be more, but the above come immediately to mind. Without keeping a scorecard, I figure in the entire batch it's possible to summon about a dozen protracted chuckles, several grins, and a couple of Hollywood nods (the Hollywood nod is where you remain straight-faced, nod and remark: "That's funny," which as Mort Sahl once explained is murder on a working comic). This doesn't come from one of the flicks mind you, but in toto, or about twelve hours of comedy filming. Not what you'd call a good average.

But then, that's what's the trouble about criticizing comedies. What you may sit through like, in Lenny Bruce's terminology, an oil painting may have your neighbor falling on the theatre floor in hysterics. For instance, most of my fun with the above came from Oliver Reed's impersonation of an Indian in the *Cathouse* caper, which was partially offset because Lee Marvin was playing his role in a different style and Robert Culp his in yet another fashion, causing the movie to bump along to a watery conclusion, and grab your fun where you may find it. However, this may be unfair to the film, comparatively speaking, for it's far from the worst of the lot. *The Dirtwater Fox* is an embarrassment for all concerned, including Goldie Hawn, and even George Segal, who's been trapped in more than his share of embarrassments. *The Big Bus* is supposedly a spoof of disaster epics but is geared at about the level of one of those sub-literate imitations of *Mad* magazine, everybody nudging everybody over how clever they are. *Won Ton Ton*, also a spoof, is positively sickening, with all those oldtime guest players doing bits without laughs and looking embalmed.

Murder By Death pleased a lot of people, but the idea of a houseful of sleuthing parodies has about enough substance for a skit on the old TV Show of Shows, or approximately seven minutes' worth. Since Neil Simon wrote it, perhaps the TV files were dusted off--easy to imagine Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner and Howard Morris doing the turns in place of Sellers, Falk, Niven, Maggie Smith etc. *Harry and Walter* has James Caan and Elliott Gould attempting Abbott & Costello, or two-thirds of *The Three Stooges*. It's a flatfooted two hours, courtesy of mistimed direction; the reviewers creamed it, but it softened me somewhat because it seemed anxious to please and not smugly secure that it was a laugh riot. Disney is Disney no matter, so onward.

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CAPTAIN GEORGE

The following Hallowe'en bulletin comes courtesy of CBC-FM Radio:

Hallowe'en is the time when ghoulies and ghosties and other creatures of the dark come out for a night's fling. Joining them this year is that fiend incarnate--the human vampire. Dracula, the most blood-curdling horror story of all time, is resurrected on CBC-FM's Stereo Theatre, Sunday, Oct. 31 at 10:03 p. m.

This BBC production of Dracula, prepared for CBC Radio by Peter Donkin, is a spine-chilling dramatization of the story that immortalized the legend of the blood-sucking vampire in human form. Since Bram Stoker's novel was published in 1897, it has never been out of print. It has seen almost 50 film versions, ranging from Bela Lugosi's impersonation in 1931, to Andy Warhol's 1975 production. It has also been re-created on stage. There are at least two Count Dracula Societies, one in the States and one in Canada.

Undeniably, there is a cult interest in Dracula. Why? A spate of books on the subject, including two biographies of Dracula's Irish-born author, attempt to sort out the psychological complexities of this Gothic novel, its sexual undercurrents, the consequence of the nightmarish experiences of a sickly child (Stoker), an unhealthy interest in sado-masochism and death.

Whatever the reason behind it, Stoker was certainly aware of the vampire superstition in Slavic mythology which held that the soul of a criminal left its grave at night, assumed the shape of a bat, and searched out the blood of humans for his evening meal...

Dracula was adapted for the BBC by Eric Macdonald and stars David March in the title role. Howling wolves, creaking doors and agonized shrieks help build up the growing horror as Jonathan Harker, along with his wife Mina, follow the Count from Transylvania to England, where more diabolical deeds are committed, and back to Castle Dracula where its master is finally impaled through the heart in his coffin.

So when Hallowe'en night arrives, the moon is full and chill autumn winds are howling, turn down the lights, turn up your radio, and listen to Dracula. It's a bloody good show!

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Silent Movie should have been the standout but wasn't, primarily because Mel Brooks is not a physical comedian. He's also not much of a director unless you're assured he can do no wrong. Otherwise, Blazing Saddles increasingly appears a fluke, a raunchily funny dirty joke of a movie. Silent Movie must have been a real knee-slapper on paper, all those jokesters doing a whole shtick minus dialogue. But too many gags just hang there, and even the good ones suffer because they're either not worked out completely or paced wrong.

Maybe all these efforts are sidesplitters and I'm just having a bad day. Pardon me while I go out and kick some little children.

PETE HARRIS

AGAIN, THE GREAT DETECTIVE: As a long-time Sherlock Holmes aficionado, I wasn't offended by the new TV movie, *Sherlock Holmes In New York*, with Roger Moore as Holmes, Patrick Macnee as Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson and John Huston as Professor Moriarty. It was played straight; it was suitably atmospheric; it was visually faithful (or seemed to be) to the period--turn of the century--and there were some interesting character people...but...but, it wasn't Sherlock Holmes.

Probably because of the unavoidable influence of Basil Rathbone's portrayal of Holmes while I was growing up, I have always been compelled to use it as a yardstick against which to measure subsequent portrayals, by such people as Peter Cushing, Ronald Howard, John Neville and Robert Stephens. And, always, it is Rathbone's presence that overwhelms all who follow. I've always liked Roger Moore as an actor, but he is absolutely the wrong physical type to play Holmes. The Saint, yes; even, with slight reservations, James Bond. He might even be believable as Raffles or Richard Hannay or Bulldog Drummond. But not as Sherlock Holmes.

As I said, there were some interesting character people, including Jackie Coogan as a hotel clerk, Signe Hasso as Irene Adler's German maid, Leon Ames as theatrical producer Daniel Furman (sic) and Billy Benedict as a telegraph clerk. As Don Daynard commented, 20 years ago he'd have played the telegraph delivery boy. And then there was Charlotte Rampling doing her Lauren Bacall number as Irene Adler. And, it was the broad suggestion that her son, who figured prominently in the case, had been fathered by Sherlock Holmes during a European fling 10 years earlier, that threw the whole thing completely off the rails. The film even became poignant as it slowly dawned on Holmes that possibly, just possibly, the kid was his. It was touching, almost moving, but, dash it all, it wasn't Holmes.

There was an interesting theatrical footnote thrown in early in the film. When Irene Adler is unable to appear in the opening performance of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, her replacement is announced as none other than May Robson, who much later appeared in such movies as *Lady For A Day*, *Dinner At Eight* and *A Star Is Born* ('37). Which sent me scurrying to the archives to see if she had in fact appeared in that particular play at that particular time (circa 1901).

Interestingly enough, there was a production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* that season, but with Mrs. Patrick Campbell. May Robson, on the other hand, who had been appearing on the New York stage since at least 1893, was in something called *The Messenger Boy* with James T. Powers. So, unless I'm mistaken, it's hardly likely she'd have been an understudy at that stage of her career. Nice try, anyway, guys.